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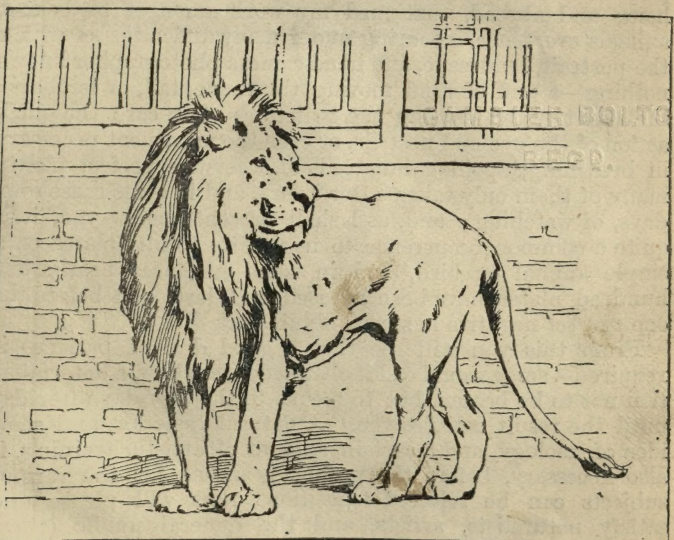
ANIMAL PHOTOGRAPHY:

Its Difficulties, Uses, and Abuses.

By GAMBIER BOLTON, F.Z.S.

*Being a Paper read before the Photographic Convention
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ANIMAL PHOTOGRAPHY: ITS DIFFICULTIES, USES, AND ABUSES. BY GAMBIER BOLTON, F.Z.S.

The animal and bird studies from life which I am about to show you to-night are generally admitted to be the results of one of the first serious attempts yet made to combine, in however small a degree, scientific and artistic qualities in animal photography.

Commencing in 1872 with a three guinea set from our old friend Fallowfield, of Lambeth, in the days of wet collodion plates and cumbersome apparatus, I have, off and on, both at home and abroad, continued my work amongst birds and animals ever since, labouring under many difficulties of which the portrait, landscape, and hand-camera photographer knows nothing—a puff of wind moving the mane, tail, or feathers; the slight sound causing the twitching of an ear; the quick action of the eye and nostrils, or even the movement necessary in breathing, spoiling hundreds of otherwise perfect plates, many of them only taken after hours, and in some cases even days, of watching; and, as I shall presently show you, it is quite a common occurrence to use thirty to fifty plates on a single animal or bird, and in some instances nearly one hundred plates have been exposed and developed before the one *perfect* negative has been obtained.

From this you will see that a good deal of patience is required—some would call it obstinacy—anyhow, a determination not to be beaten, but to return to the task day after day until the result satisfies you. A natural taste for, and some idea of, zoology, and a certain amount of artistic training, is also necessary, before the proper positions for the various subjects can be selected—positions that will please and satisfy naturalists, artists, and the general public (three rather hard task-masters, I find), whilst, to take up this work with the idea of producing only the best possible results,

throwing aside all others, must mean such a heavy outlay and expense as to prevent it from ever being made to answer from a financial point of view, at least in our day.

With so many public and private zoological collections around us there is little or no demand at present for animal studies, except, perhaps, amongst the learned societies and artists; but we must remember that animals and birds that are useless to man have had their day, have already reached and passed their zenith, and the time is not far distant when photographs of many of these will be sought after, and like a really good, large photograph of the quagga or dodo to-day would be almost priceless, for following these we have many such as the bison (American and European), zebra, giraffe and hippopotamus, fast disappearing before the march of civilisation, and it can only now be a question of a comparatively few years before they, too, become extinct, and we shall be compelled to turn to paintings, and, above all, photographs, to show our descendants what they were like.

This, then, I consider the first and greatest use of animal photography, and I am glad to say that it is being recognised as such at last; for, as some of you know, the British Museum authorities have lately ordered a set of these studies to be framed and hung in the Geological Section at South Kensington. And if, as I feel sure, there are many here who, naturally fond of zoology, have taken up photography as an amusement, I would urge them, especially if they travel, to lose no opportunity of getting good negatives of the more scarce varieties of animals and birds, as they will be invaluable for future reference. Do not waste your plates on such childishly easy subjects as swans, deer, cattle and sheep. Our exhibitions have swarmed with them from time immemorial. They have been taken in every conceivable position years ago, in the old days of wet collodion and long exposure, when there *was* some difficulty attached to the work, but I urge you to aim somewhat higher—read up the habits and peculiarities of the animal or bird you propose taking, and endeavour to show them plainly in your finished print, and you will not only be giving yourself real pleasure, but also benefitting the generation to come.

Let me here pause for a moment to answer a question that I am continually being asked—“*What is a perfect animal photograph?*” First and foremost it should have

had sufficient exposure to bring out all possible detail in the hair *and in the shadows*, detail being necessary in this branch of photography almost more than in any other. It follows, then, that the perfect photograph, though taken in soft sunlight (which should be avoided if possible), should not be an instantaneous one, but should have had a fair exposure. I *know* that this means hours of watching and waiting, when a snap-shot might be obtained in a few moments, but, as I hope to show you, the resulting negative is very different. One is of little or no use; the other may be of use to naturalists and artists for all time.

The perfect animal photograph, then, should be free from heavy shadows, full of life, yet unrestrained, natural in position and expression—*all four legs and the tail* should show distinctly, and the mane (if any), nostrils, ears, eyes and *hairs round them* should be microscopically sharp.

I would urge these things particularly upon those who are called upon to JUDGE animal studies, as this is the real test of the perfect one. And may I also add a word of warning—take care that the photograph was not from a *stuffed* subject, as taxidermy has been brought to such a pitch of perfection (especially abroad) that unless a very careful examination is made, in many cases one may be taken in.

Animal photography is not only useful to the scientist, as I have endeavoured to show, but also to the artist. There are still some, I am sorry to say, who deny that they ever use them, and, as the dealers tell me, slip in and out of their shops looking as though they had committed an unpardonable sin; but from what I have seen and heard, I am convinced that all use them more or less, and many openly admit their indebtedness to photography, whilst not a few possess cameras of their own, and may be seen using them constantly. It was the need of an artist in the country, requiring a special position of a tiger to sketch from, that first induced me to publish my series; as going the round of the London dealers I found that, though one or two had made an attempt to bring out some large-sized photographs of animals, they were taken so small originally as to be woolly and flat, and of no use whatever to the artist; and I was convinced then, as I am now, that no one can hope to succeed in this by working occasionally with a small hand-camera, but he must use a large camera, and devote his whole time, in fact, his life to the work.

I have touched on some of the difficulties and uses of animal photography. Let me now speak briefly of its abuses.

I am sorry to say that the professional photographer has a good deal of blame to bear, for he is, I fear, a hopeless case in this respect. Take a walk round any city, and look in at their windows, and you see rows of dogs' *heads*, lacking expression as much as they do bodies—dogs and cats lying down in sleepy positions or sitting up, looking like wooden dummies; horses and cows with three legs and a smudge representing the tail or ears, all with the scared look that tells of the assistant not far off, waving a handkerchief or clapping his hands, or taken at such an angle that the heads are large enough for elephants, whilst the bodies fade away into the distance “fine by degrees and beautifully less.” It is amusing to enter with a dog and say in a quiet way that you wish him taken *standing*, and above all with his tail *up*. The innumerable excuses that will be invented, the old, old story that heads are so much more fashionable and artistic, that they look so natural when lying down or sitting up, anything, in fact, but standing, and, above all, without that exasperating caudal appendage raised. I have heard photographers lament the waste of time and plates used over a child's portrait, but when they have heard of the hours of watching and hundreds of plates thrown into the waste box before good negatives of dogs standing and *with their tails up* can be obtained, they have thanked their stars that *their* lines have fallen in more pleasant places. Of course there are very rare instances where it is right to take only a head, for instance, when the body is badly shaped, deformed or injured; but these are very exceptional circumstances, and I would therefore urge the professional photographer the wide world over, to look to this matter at once, and try to introduce a little more life and expression into his animal photographs, particularly into those of the horse, dog, and cat.

But professional photographers are not the only ones to abuse this branch of our Art-science. There are amateurs, I regret to say, men high up—in fact, at the very top of the tree, whose pictures (for they are nothing else when the animal portion is left out) *have* won and are *still* winning medals at every exhibition, and whose work is pointed out to the rising generation as a model for them to aim up to. They rightly introduce animals into their work, but using a wide-

angle lens, get such hideous distortion as to become perfectly painful to those who have to sit and gaze upon these "nightmares" day after day, as many of us are often compelled to do during a club or "one-man exhibition."

Others too (and here many of our very oldest workers are the chief offenders), rather than lose some picturesque group, will take a negative with a horse, cow or donkey's tail or ears blurred from movement, thinking probably that the charm and beauty of the whole composition will draw off the attention from such a trifling fault. But surely, even our friends, the (photographic) naturalists would not strain their theory so far as this, and endeavour to make the blurred ear or tail the starting point for the out-of-focus portion of their picture.

But there are, I regret to say, far worse offenders than either of these. Amongst the changes which I have seen during my photographic life is that of a school of men which has sprung up during the last three or four seasons calling themselves detective-camera animal photographers. Now, there is no harm in using a hand camera occasionally for animal photography, especially if it is made to focus and show exactly what is being taken at the moment of exposure on the twin-lens principle of the London Stereoscopic Co., for by this means many very valuable negatives can be obtained with a slowed down shutter and by working on cloudy days. But the school of which I am now speaking will have none of this. With box cameras and a rough scale for focussing by, they rush about in blazing sunlight, taking snap-shots at every conceivable living thing that comes within their reach, and in every possible position: in fact, as I have seen with regret at several exhibitions lately, they simply prostitute this branch of scientific photography by showing us hideous caricatures of some of God's noblest works—animals taken at such an angle as to be all head or hind quarters, minus one or two legs, an ear or tail, lions yawning and scratching themselves, dogs climbing up trees, giraffes all body and no head—things done for the sole purpose, as they often admit, of raising a laugh at the unhappy animal's expense. How, I venture to ask, would one of these so-called artists of the funny school like to see themselves on show in a shop window, taken when suffering from influenza, a bad toothache, or when they have just sat down upon the business-end of a tin-tack? Surely our aim should be a higher one than this,

and if we are going to devote our time to zoological photography, let us at least try to show our subjects in the most artistic and natural positions.

Forgive me if I have spoken too strongly on this subject, but where we see signs all around us of animals being rapidly exterminated as civilisation advances, it is surely time for someone to make a stand, and, in endeavouring to point out the *uses* of animal photography, not to pass by in silence its glaring and manifold *abuses*, which not only scientists and artists have condemned, but which the good taste and better education of the rising generation has taught them *are* abuses, and I trust sincerely that those who have perpetrated them will leave this branch of photography alone for the future, and turn their attention and talents to something a little less ambitious than the endeavour to win for themselves the proud title of the Landseers of photography; for this cannot be laid claim to by any precocious upstart after a few months of practice at animal photography, but can only be hoped for after years of hard work of head and hand; and beside such a title as this, all those vapoury names of kings and princes of hand-camera work which they have arrogated to themselves, must fade into insignificance, for there may be many kings and princes, but we have no Landseers.

I propose to show you now two lantern slides as an instance of *how not to do it*. The first is that of a lion (?) standing behind the bars of his cage. This slide, I am told by the maker, has been sold by thousands, and is used all over the civilised world, with lectures, as an example of what the king of beasts looks like. Beyond a nose and a few hairs there is absolutely nothing but a very fine study of iron bars. The hand-camera school are particularly fond of these negatives, one of them observing last year that he thought the bars gave a greater idea of the animal's ferocity and strength. He forgot to add that he could not possibly photograph them *without* the bars, as he was not permitted to get inside the outer enclosure at the Zoological Gardens.

The second slide that I propose showing you is that of a bull-dog bought from a London shop window last week. This is rather a good specimen of its kind, but he is strapped down in the long grass, apparently to a rock, and as a study of a collar, strap, grass, and rock is good, but there is very little

bull-dog, and how anyone could ever be tempted to waste a plate on such a really good subject, in such a hideous position as this, is one of those things that will probably never be revealed.

I shall next try to show you what I hope you will agree with me in saying is *the way to do it*. Commencing with the Carnivora (taken standing, in dull light, and without the bars) we will pass on through the Ungulata, leaving the Birds and Dogs till the end.

I would mention that all these studies were taken with a whole-plate camera, on dull days, rarely instantaneous, but the majority having had from one to two seconds' exposure.

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Mr. Gambier Bolton then passed about fifty slides through the magic lantern, which, he mentioned, had this year been shown at the Royal Society (Burlington House), The Royal Institution (twice), The Linnæan Society, and The Zoological Society, London, which were wonderfully telling in the expression and attitude of the animals shown, as well as full of detail and "life." They were received with much well-deserved applause.

H. S.

